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A REVIEW OF THE CACAO SITUATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF LIBERIA

The agricultural policy of the Department of Agriculture and Commerce of the Republic of Liberia is to encourage the production of tree crops on upland and rolling areas and to gradually move the growing of rice down into the inland swamps and marshes. This program seems to be meeting with some success, for there are areas planted to cacao this year that were in upland rice last year. The Cooperative Program of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is largely responsible for the expansion of tree crops on the uplands. The extension agents out in the counties, provinces and at the Suakoko Research Station maintain cacao nurseries, give seedlings to the farmers and advise on plantings and care of the trees, and some growers have taken the advice and established their own nurseries.

Liberia Company Plantation

The Liberia Company cacao and coffee plantation is under the management of four highly trained German specialists and excellent records have been maintained. This plantation is practically serving as a cacao and coffee research station for Liberia. The seedlings are grown under the strictest supervision and only sturdy, disease-free plants are planted, in baskets, into the field plots. The planting and maintenance are closely supervised by the specialists. With all the care and attention given, from seed selection to transplanting, the effective survival of cacao is only about 35 percent. Fifty percent of the total number planted might survive, but only 35 percent is worth retaining. The officials of this company have found that it takes over three years before all required replanting is done and a satisfactory full stand of cacao is obtained.

Production and Disappearance

Liberian Production and Exports, July 1, 1955 to June 30, 1956
(Long tons)

Item	1955-56 Crop	1956-57 Crop
Production (estimated)	700	800
Exports (recorded)*	532	600
Unrecorded exports (estimated)*	168	200

* The exports are for the period July 1, 1955 to June 30, 1956 which correspond closely with cacao crop years in Liberia.

Price and Marketing

There is no system of establishing producer prices and regulating purchasing and marketing. The price paid by the exporter to the middlemen depends upon what the exporter believes the market will be when he ships the cacao. The prices change from day to day. There was keen competition for the 1955-56 crop and the price paid to the middlemen ranged from 25 to 26 cents per pound. The exporters were glad to sell the 1955-56 crop for 19 to 22 cents per pound. The first purchases of the 1956-57 crop were made in August and the price paid to the middlemen was 18 to 20 cents per pound, which is believed to give the grower about 16 cents per pound.

The Liberian Legislature on February 23, 1956 enacted the law establishing the National Production Council and by Presidential Proclamation, August 27, 1956, the Council began functioning on September 1, 1956. This Council deals with export and food crops, and is empowered to set up production quotas, extend loans (through a Credit Corporation), establish producer prices, and purchase, grade and market the crop. (The purchasing and marketing would be done in areas where suitable facilities do not exist). Council actions will have little effect on the 1956-57 crop, but could exercise considerable control on the 1957-58 and succeeding crops.

Planting, Total Acreage and Tree Ages

The best estimates indicate that the Cooperative Program was responsible for approximately 1,000 acres (full stand at 500 trees per acre); the more progressive farmers put in another 400 acres and the Liberia Company put in 600 acres, giving a total of 2,000 acres planted from July 1, 1955 to June 30, 1956. Total acreage, all ages, is roughly 14,000 acres. The age distribution is approximately 5,000 acres 30 to 40 years, 6,000 acres 4 to 8 years and 3,000 acres 1 to 4 years. The trees 30 to 40 years and the group 4 to 8 years must be giving low per acre yields (about 250 pounds per acre). The most optimistic estimate of total yield is 700 to 900 long tons per year.

Insects and Diseases

Insects: The Ambrosia beetle Xyleborus morstattii is the worst insect pest at present and the greatest losses are on poor soils where the young seedlings are growing slowly. Capsids, Sahlbengella and Distintiella are not wide spread, however, there is great concern over possible damage in the future. Stem borers do some damage.

Diseases: There are no reported outbreaks of swollen shoot. Black pod is causing limited losses.

Outlook

The Republic of Liberia is trying hard to increase the quantity and quality of export commodities and cacao is an item which fits in with this policy. Present indications are that the production of cacao in the Republic of Liberia should increase very rapidly within the next few years.